**2008F034R Organic dairy transition in Alberta:**

**feed quality, herd health and production economics**

**U of A: Burim Ametaj**

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Background: Canadian organic milk sales are valued at over $ 29 million, Alberta represents 7 % of sales and the highest increase in market demand but only one farm is organic, therefore most product is imported from other provinces. Dairy farmers interested in transitioning have expressed concern over what to expect and there is limited information available. The objective of this project was to support the development of a viable organic dairy industry in Alberta by characterizing the key crop, livestock and economic factors as well as identifying and addressing constraints of the organic transition.

Methods: 6 farms participated in the study and were observed over the last 2 of 3 transition years and 1 after organic certification. Health and fertility was monitored over 4 years and information was gathered from DHI and veterinary records. Metabolism and immune function was determined through blood samples taken in the dry, early and mid-lactation during each season over 3 years. Lameness and cow comfort was assessed on farm by 2 visits by observers and the regular hoof trimmer. Feed management and productivity as well as milk quality and production was measured.

Outcome: Management practices varied considerable across farms through the transition period. Generally milk yield did not decrease through the transition and introduction of grazing did not appear to negatively impact overall productivity of cows. Metabolically cows also appeared to be healthier once transitioned, specifically in the fresh period, either due to nutritional management or decreased production expectations.

Recommendations: ?

Benefits to industry: Increasing the efficiency of transition to organic farming may encourage more farmers to switch. This represents an opportunity to increase Alberta’s production of organic products.

Extension:

* 1 manuscript submitted to a scientific journal
* 4 poster presentations at ADSA, JAM and ASAS
* Results posted on OACC website